

# AJC Voter Guide: Georgia Elections 2022

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Atlanta Civic Circle teamed up to contact hundreds of candidates to provide voters with a side-by-side look at the candidates for office, their views on issues voters care about most, their party affiliation and their history in elective politics. Our Georgia Decides voter guide includes basic information on candidates for statewide office, the legislature and candidates for local office throughout metro Atlanta. These include county officials such as county commissioners or school board members.

## Choose an office:



Catherine Bernard

Candidate, State House District 83

Republican



Karen Lupton

Candidate, State House District 83

Democrat



1. How does your background equip you for the job you are seeking?



**Catherine Bernard:** By allowing me to directly see the impact that laws have on people. Like all lawyers, I have experienced the law as something to study and practice. But as a public defender, I also saw it as something done to actual human beings. I have testified before legislative committees, I have drafted legislation for citizen coalitions and elected officials. I have argued the language of the Georgia Constitution and the Official Code of Georgia Annotated to juries and judges across the state. I have spent over three decades studying and working in law and politics, specifically in the context of how to maximize justice. From a childhood interest in obvious historical atrocities like slavery and the Holocaust to working for and owning a law firm, to a career as a public defender; to my work on local and state issues in Brookhaven and other parts of Georgia, I have always been focused on

how the law impacts lives and communities.



**Karen Lupton:** From my time serving on Chamblee City Council, I'm equipped to handle the rigors of policy making, the politics of governance and the pains and joys of constituent services. I'm proud that I was able to secure resources for residents and businesses, implement new technology and processes to keep staff and residents safe while ensuring uninterrupted city services during the height of the COVID pandemic. From my experience parenting two public school students, and serving on multiple education foundations' boards, I'm knowledgeable of the inner workings of our school system and will be able to be an effective advocate for our public schools from day one. From the seven years spent working with elders with Alzheimer's and dementia, I've witnessed first-hand the challenges of those in long-term care and their caregivers. This experience and expertise gives me a unique perspective of the healthcare industry, elder care and public health policy.



2. What role should government have in the lives of Georgians? How would you apply that philosophy to the job you are seeking?



**Catherine Bernard:** Government exists to secure liberty and justice for all. As state representative, I would apply that philosophy rigorously and thoughtfully, making sure that all parts of that equation (freedom, accountability, equal opportunity) are honored and valued for all Georgians.



**Karen Lupton:** I was raised to believe that good government and strong communities are built by citizen participation. And therefore, government can be a robust tool to build thriving communities for all residents. Beyond just delivering services, like roads and sewers, I believe that government should sustain a social safety net in order to strengthen the whole of our state. This not only is a moral imperative, but it is sound fiscal policy to invest in public well-being. Our government should be a reflection of the will of the electorate and can keep society from serving the interests of only the powerful.



3. If you are elected (or reelected), what problems will you spend the most time solving and why?



**Catherine Bernard:** First, the problem of legislators not reading all of the bills they're voting on. If there are too many bills to read, there are too many bills to vote on. Second, the problem of government-created/strengthened obstacles to opportunity and prosperity for all Georgians. Bureaucracy grows at the expense of the productive classes, and stifles growth and innovation that benefit our diverse communities. Free markets and free people are better than government picking winners and losers. Third, the misdirection of public safety resources in ways that put us all in danger. We have to focus on violent and property crime, which are the actual threats to our communities. The drug war is vacuuming up massive amounts of law enforcement time and money, and has created a world in which rape kits and murder evidence go untested while state labs are clogged with drug cases. Defend police by tasking them with actually protecting lives, liberties, and property.



**Karen Lupton:** 1. Mitigating the rising costs of energy, housing, and health care 2. Assuring safe, healthy communities for all Georgians: from protecting our families from gun violence, safeguarding women’s reproductive rights, to expanding access to affordable healthcare and supporting our police and first responders 3. Providing an excellent public education for all our children Accomplishing these goals will make a brighter and more secure future for our state.



4. Georgia is a politically diverse state. How will you work to represent Georgians whose political views differ from your own?



**Catherine Bernard:** With enthusiasm and respect. I regularly represent Georgians whose political views differ from my own and continue to learn a tremendous amount from the experience. "No man is a villain in his own story" is a truth that resonates. Working to understand people's motivations and perspectives — especially when we disagree — is a critical part of participating in community and civic life with empathy, integrity and effectiveness. Genuine curiosity about points of disagreement is key. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.



**Karen Lupton:** I served as a nonpartisan elected official in the city of Chamblee, representing residents with deep political divides. I was motivated to find common ground and prioritize the needs of the whole community because that is our role and responsibility- to work on behalf of the people. It is only natural that not everyone has the same political beliefs. In order to build consensus, I had to establish trust through active listening and engagement with my colleagues and constituents. The same will be true in the state legislature. I might not personally agree with another representative's or constituent's viewpoint, but by listening to their reasoning and respecting their point of view, the chance to establish mutual respect is created. With that respect comes a willingness to work together and build consensus, in spite of differences.



5. Who has been the biggest influence on how you view state government and politics? What have you learned from this person?



**Catherine Bernard:** My father, David Bernard, whose encyclopedic knowledge of history, which necessarily involves a lot of politics, helped develop my understanding of the way our world works. He served as captain of the rescue squad, on international church missions, and a variety of community projects, including a run for the Virginia state Senate as a Democrat in 2011. Learning about the complex and fascinating history of our country's founding and subsequent politics from a lens of justice and truth has been a gift. I have learned that people can know all the same facts and have the same values, yet see individual political issues differently.



**Karen Lupton:** I grew up in rural Pennsylvania in a blue collar town, within a strong Christian family. I've lived in Atlanta for my entire adult life, but I still hold fast to the values my parents instilled in me and I still consider those teachings to

be my foundation for public service. I've worked to practice the ideals of service and love during my career in music, music therapy and on the Chamblee City Council. Making decisions based on fear or anger will not bring about the best solutions, so turning to cooperation, patience and understanding is best for all. My goal is to lift up small voices and make our chorus bigger and more inclusive, as I've been taught to do.



6. Georgia has a lot to offer current and potential residents, but many parts of the state are becoming increasingly unaffordable. Please explain your proposed approach to address housing affordability through legislation and executive actions?



**Catherine Bernard:** Reduce regulations that do not directly ensure the safety of residents and respect for neighboring property rights. Recent studies have shown that regulations make up over 23% of the cost of new single family home and over 40% of the cost of multifamily developments. Property taxes are another factor increasing costs to both owners and renters, and government's use of eminent domain can also increase costs while depriving vulnerable Georgians of housing. I will work to increase housing access by reducing these bureaucratic burdens and protecting property rights.



**Karen Lupton:** I am very familiar with our state's housing issues, through my position in local government. Georgia needs to be open to innovation when it comes to creating affordable housing. To keep our communities viable for ALL, we must incentivize affordable housing plans and developments with local governments and markets, in concert with public or private means. It is in the best interests of our neighborhoods to keep our seniors, young families, police, nurses and other essential workers living in our communities. In addition, we need to adopt better

funding opportunities for housing solutions, and support statewide policies to increase workforce housing near transit hubs and economically vibrant areas.



7. Politics is often about compromise. How do you decide when to compromise and take small, incremental wins, and when to refuse compromise?



**Catherine Bernard:** All progress is incremental, but not all increments are progress. I keep (conservative leader) Morton Blackwell's words in mind as I negotiate with government every day on behalf of my clients and neighbors. I always act with honesty and accountability as we navigate complicated and difficult situations with lots of different characters and motivations involved. I will consult my constituents regularly and respectfully on these difficult political calculations on a given issue, and be ready to defend whatever approach we decide to pursue. That will look different depending on whether we're talking housing policy or police funding, so we've got to keep truth and transparency as the guiding principle.



**Karen Lupton:** Our system of government is based on finding solutions to our problems through compromise. The best compromises are made when the agreement provides for the advancement of policies that do more good than harm for the most people -- including our most vulnerable populations. I'm not going to compromise on issues that will put a minority class of people in harm's way or weakened positions on the basis of any -isms (sexism, racism, ageism, etc). Examples include limiting reproductive healthcare or restricting voting rights for the poor, the elderly, or communities of color.





8. There were politicians who questioned the outcomes of Georgia elections in 2018 and 2020. Do you think Georgia's elections are secure and will you stand by the results?



**Catherine Bernard:** It is vital in representative government that elections are accurate and voting procedures secure, so that citizens trust the outcome of elections and avoid vicious divisiveness that can destroy a country. In 2019, I was appointed to the DeKalb County Voter Registration and Elections Ad Hoc Committee, in response to perceived election issues. On that committee, I worked to ensure that the right to vote was protected for everyone, and that all processes were fair and transparent. Since 2019, people from across the state have been working hard to ensure that elections are secure and that people can stand behind the results. Like any intelligent, critically thinking person, I will stand by any elections that are fair and secure, and will work to improve any processes that lead to a perception of or an actual lack of security.



**Karen Lupton:** Yes and Yes. I believe Georgia does not have an election security issue, however, it does have a voting access issue, which is different. Voting is a right, not a type of challenge. The ballot for any given election should be as accessible as possible, and should take into account barriers that voters may face. No matter a voter's location, economic status, language, or mobility, access to voting should be expanded, not constricted. I will stand by our election results.



9. In light of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on abortion, state law and local enforcement authority will determine access to abortion.



**Catherine Bernard:** Having seeing prosecutors and police use criminal laws to violate people's constitutional rights, I will seek to keep government out of health care.



**Karen Lupton:** As a legislator, I will work passionately to increase access to all reproductive healthcare, including abortion and access to contraceptives , and I will oppose any restriction proposed to a women's right to bodily autonomy and her agency. Our recently-enacted extreme anti-abortion laws reveal a complete misunderstanding of pregnancy and the needs of women and families.



10. Are there any programs/legislation you've sponsored or created to help people with disabilities?



**Catherine Bernard:** As a public defender, many of my clients have mental or physical disabilities, which present unique challenges in ensuring that their

constitutional rights and physical safety are protected. I often think back to previous volunteer experience with literacy programs for children and adults as I assist them in navigating difficult circumstances. I work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and community mental health centers frequently. People with disabilities often have an especially hard time dealing with bureaucratic systems. I want to help eliminate any unnecessary obstacles to flourishing.



**Karen Lupton:** I have been working in nursing homes since 2015, when I was hired to create and expand a therapeutic music program at multiple facilities for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia. Improving their lives and cognitive abilities through music was a deeply rewarding experience, and gives me a unique understanding of the healthcare industry, elder care and public health policy. Citizens with disabilities and the families who care for them should be able to live full and fulfilling lives.



11. Georgia closed out its budget year with a "likely record surplus, billions of dollars in federal aid and a growing economy." Georgia spends more than half of this money on education and health care. What would you want to see in the budget in terms of spending or taxes?



**Catherine Bernard:** Returning it to the people of Georgia, and not politically connected individuals or groups.



**Karen Lupton:** State spending should go towards investment in the lives of the citizens of Georgia. Our healthcare system is crumbling. I would want Georgia's budget to include fully expanding Medicaid so we can use the billion-plus in federal relief dollars towards shoring up hospitals, providing more good-paying healthcare jobs, and ultimately, lowering healthcare costs for all Georgians. Economic prosperity cannot exist in places without a healthy populace. Even considering the percentage of our state budget spent on education, Georgia still falls well below the national average for spending-per-pupil, and it shows. Investment in education will net good returns. Better schools mean higher home values, more vibrant communities, and better-educated students mean a better workforce for the state. I want to see in our budget a modern and updated funding formula for schools.



12. The Legislature often votes along party lines. When would you seek bipartisan action and what issues merit such consensus?



**Catherine Bernard:** As Frederick Douglass said: "I will unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong." The issues facing Georgians are much less partisan than the paid political industry often makes them appear. Good people can find common ground when we embrace cooperation and consent rather than seeking to coerce others into living their lives as we think they should. If an action is worth taking, it is worth making the case to everyone — not just people on one side. For example, when our coalition of citizens successfully opposed the legalization of no-knock search warrants in Georgia, we enjoyed support, from the Atlanta Progressive News to the Walker County Tea Party. Liberty and justice for all, as a practical matter, is a lot more popular than TV news would have us believe.



**Karen Lupton:** Frankly, most issues should merit consensus. Our state and our country would be a better place if we could find common ground on more issues through active listening, cooperation, education and compromise. That being said, the reality is outside of a few divisive issues, most bills that address our state's needs are passed with bipartisan support. However, Georgia's relatively short legislative session of 40 days leaves little time to wrestle with difficult issues in a meaningful manner before Sine Die.

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### **Govpack**

Data for candidate profiles in Georgia Decides was produced, in part, in partnership with Govpack, an open source tool and research service that seeks to increase transparency and accessibility around elections and public officials. To find out more, visit [govpack.org](http://govpack.org). Govpack is led by Fernando Diaz. Research was provided by Olivia Allen, Elliott Oppenheim, Ben Swedberg, and Atharva Weling.